IN THE CLAIMS

1-23 (Cancelled)

24. (New) A variable die assembly for drying materials, comprising:

a die body defining a longitudinally-oriented, interior passage through which the material is moved;

an adjustment sleeve into which said die body and said interior passage are received, said adjustment sleeve and said die body configured for complementary attachment to each other; and

a filter-screen attached to said adjustment sleeve and comprising a plurality of openings of predetermined size through which the material can be expelled;

wherein said adjustment sleeve is selectively movable along said die body such that the distance between said filter screen and said die body may be adjusted.

25. (New) A variable die assembly for drying materials as in claim 24, wherein said die body has a threaded outer surface and wherein said adjustment sleeve has a threaded inner surface configured for complementary receipt of the threaded outer surface of said die body.

26. (New) A variable die assembly for drying materials as in claim 24, wherein said filter screen and said die body define opposing frustoconical surfaces between which the material can pass.

27. (New) A variable die assembly for drying materials as in claim 26, wherein said filter screen defines a turbulence chamber configured for receipt of the material passing through said opposing frustoconical surfaces.

28. (New) A variable die assembly for drying materials as in claim 24, further comprising a gear attached to said adjustment sleeve for rotating said adjustment sleeve.

29. (New) A variable die assembly for drying materials as in claim 24, wherein said filter

screen is attached into an end of said adjustment sleeve.

30. (New) A variable die assembly for drying materials as in claim 24, further comprising a seal positioned between an outer surface of the die body and an inner surface of the adjustment sleeve.

31. (New) A method of drying material, comprising the steps of

moving the material along a longitudinally-oriented conduit within a die body, the die body being positioned within an adjustment sleeve;

passing the material between opposing surfaces defined by the die body and a filter screen, the filter screen being attached to the adjustment sleeve;

flowing the material into a chamber defined by the filer screen;

venting the material through a plurality of apertures located in the filter screen; and

adjusting the pressure of the material in the die body by rotating the adjustment sleeve so as to change the distance between the opposing surfaces.

32. (New) A method of drying material as in claim 31, further comprising the step of reducing the pressure of the material after said passing step.

33. (New) A method of drying material as in claim 31, further comprising the step of determining the extent of said adjusting step based on physical properties of the material after said venting step.

34. (New) A method of drying material as in claim 31, wherein said opposing surfaces are frustoconically-shaped.

35. (New) A method of drying material as in claim 31, wherein said venting step facilitates the release of water in the material.

36. (New) A method of drying material as in claim 35, wherein the water is superheated prior to said venting step.

37. (New) A method of drying material as in claim 31, wherein said moving step comprises applying pressure to the material using an extruder.

38. (New) A method of drying material as in claim 31, wherein said apertures are of a predetermined size and shape.

39. (New) A method of drying material as in claim 31, wherein said adjusting step comprises rotating a gear attached to the adjustment sleeve.